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Snow and Grow January 16, 2010



Don't forget, *Snow and Grow* will be held on January 16, 2010, at the Warren Public Library. Program topics are: *Take Thyme for Herbs*, *Keeping a Garden Journal*, and *Gardening with Birds*. The program begins at 10:30 a.m. and will run until 1:30 p.m. The cost is \$5.00. Pre-registration is appreciated and can be done by calling the Cooperative Extension at 563-9388.

Winter Woods Walk

The Penn State Cooperative Extension is offering a Winter Woods walk on **Saturday, January 9, 2010**. Extension leaders will guide the walk and point out the natural and cultural treasures of our woods.

The Walk will take place at the **Buckaloons Recreation Area at 1 pm**. This event is free but pre-registration is appreciated. For more information, or to register, contact the Cooperative Extension at 563-9388.

The next Master Gardener meeting will be . . .

**January 14, 2010
6:30 p.m. at the Extension Office.**

Eagle Watch at Kinzua Dam

Opportunities to watch eagles will take place on **February 6, 2010 from 8 am until 2 pm**. Interested persons should meet at the Kinzua Dam, Visitor Center, or the Wildlife Observation Platform. Spotting scopes will be set up and leaders from the Cooperative Extension, Game Commission, Corps of Engineers and other conservation groups will be onsite to assist participants.



Admission is free, but Dam access will require a photo ID for persons 18 years and older. For additional information, contact the Cooperative Extension



Yellow Dragon stalks the US citrus crops By: Christine Kuntz

A yellow dragon is preying on our southern citrus crops. The USDA has quarantined plants in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and parts of Arizona and California, in an effort to stop the spread of Citrus Greening Disease, which is carried by the Asian citrus psyllid. This is one of the most serious citrus diseases and will often kill the tree.

Citrus greening disease, also known as Yellow Dragon Disease, is caused by the *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* bacterium. The bacterium (which is harmless to humans) is transmitted by two species of psyllid, one of which – the Asian citrus psyllid (*Diaphorina citri* Kuwayama)– is present in Florida and other southern states. This yellow dragon was first detected in the United States in August 2005.

The disease is characterized by yellow foliage (hence the name Yellow Dragon Disease). Other symptoms include blotchy mottling of leaves, yellowed shoots, and twig dieback. The fruits are small, poorly colored, sometimes lopsided, and bitter in taste. Detection can be difficult due to the long latency of symptoms. In addition, early symptoms mimic other diseases and mineral deficiencies, making detection difficult.

Scientists have not yet discovered a cure for this disease and infected trees generally die within a few years of infection. The origin of the disease in the US is unknown, but it is believed to have spread via the *Murraya paniculata* (mock orange), which is a known host of the Asian citrus psyllid.

References:

United States Department of Agriculture at www.usda.gov

Quick way to spot mealy bugs on your plants By Dan Sorensen

Although I regularly inspect my plants for insect infestations, I find that spotting mealy bugs is usually difficult until a sudden population explosion happens, partly because when present in small numbers, the insects tend to hide deep inside the plant in leaf axils and behind dead or drooping leaves. In addition to that, the young hatchlings and eggs are nearly microscopic and appear as dust or the size of tiny mites. I have found that I am able to spot the insects more easily if I do my search in low light levels and use one of the new white LED flashlights. The LED light is bright, very white, and high in ultraviolet output which makes both the insects and their white powdery egg masses almost glow when illuminated by this light. Controlling almost any insect pest is most easily accomplished when the population levels are low, presenting less stress to the plant as well. Small populations can be treated with less toxic controls. Sometimes something as simple as merely washing them off with a forceful stream of water is sufficient.





Tis the Season for Home and Garden Expos

Erie will be hosting its Home and Garden Expo on February 25 – 28, 2010 at the Bayfront Convention Center. General admission is \$6.00. As a new service / exhibit this year, **Penn State Master Gardeners** will be onsite to answer garden questions and present short talks on a host of topics, including composting, pruning, IPM, organic gardening and much more. For more information, visit: <http://www.outdoorontheweb.net/>

Buffalo will host its Expo on March 5th – 7th and 12th – 14th at the Buffalo Convention Center. General admission is \$10.00 at the door or \$7.00 if purchased on-line. This show features celebrity guest, Summer Baltzer, of HGTV's *Design on a Dime*. In addition, members of the American Institute of Architects will be onsite to assist homeowners with their design dilemmas. For more information, visit: <http://www.buffalohomeshow.com/ME2/Sites/>.

Cleveland's 67th annual Home and Garden Show will be January 22 – 31, 2010 at the Great Lakes Expo Center in Euclid, Ohio. General Admission is \$12.00. **OSU Master Gardeners** will present several programs, including container gardening, orchids, preserving the garden harvest, rose gardening, dangerously beautiful plants, and much more. There are also daily Oktoberfest performances (even though it is January), featuring Bavarian, Austrian, and Saxony music and dancers. For more information, visit: <http://www.homeandflower.com/cleveland/index.htm>.

Pittsburgh hosts its annual Expo on March 5 – 14, 2010, at the David Lawrence Convention Center. General admission is \$10.00. The Garden Pavilion boasts of 100,000 square feet of landscape, garden, and patio exhibits, including a Four Seasons garden and a Sustainability garden. For those who like to eat what they grow, the QED learning center will offer various cooking presentations throughout the show. For more information visit: <http://pghhome.com/index.php>.

Cooling Cucumbers

If holiday merriment left you feeling tired and stressed, try relaxing your eyelids with cucumber. One of the interesting properties of the cucumber is its ability to relax tired eyes, moisturize, and soothe them. Application of two freshly cut slices to the eyelids acts like natural eyedrops, reducing swelling of the bags under the eyes after a day of hard work or a long flight.



Headline spotted in the 12-24-09 Wall Street Journal (somebody had a penchant for puns):

A Christmas-Tree story: Fir-trader family reunites: A son, pining for frasers and balsams, comes home to grow a new branch of family business with some seed money from dad.



Rubberized mulch . . . Let the buyer beware By Christine Kuntz

When you thought it couldn't get any worse than the preternaturally-hued red bark mulch, now comes rubber mulch in a dazzling array of colors and textures. This inorganic mulch is made from recycled tires and is advertised to be "non-toxic", "permanent", "aesthetically pleasing", "environmentally friendly", and "safe".

You will likely see this product offered at the home and garden expos or your neighborhood big box store. Although these inorganic, rubber "mulches" have been on the market for several years, there is scant guidance regarding its safety and efficacy. Rubber mulch manufacturers advertise their products to be safe, but are these claims valid? There are some loud voices questioning the safety of this product. Linda Chalker-Scott, an Extension Horticulturist at Washington State University advises gardeners to steer clear of rubber mulch in the landscape and gardenscape. Her position appears to be largely based upon the toxicity of the mulch. Tires contain various elements not suitable to the garden, such as zinc, arsenic, cadmium, lead, and nickel. Research at Bucknell University indicates these elements can leach into the soil, causing harm to algae, snails, and fish. Others have also questioned this product, including the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, which cites studies that zinc, which is present in the rubber mulch, leaches into the soil and affects plant growth.

Other concerns relate to odor and flammability. Critics of this product claim the rubber has an unpleasant odor on hot days while sellers of rubber mulch claim the product is odorless. I have not used this product, but I can't imagine the mulch smells any worse than your cars tires do on a hot day. Another criticism is the flammability of rubber mulch. If you have ever witnessed a pile of burning tires, you understand the concerns about toxic vapors and the difficulties in dousing a tire fire. However, organic mulches, such as leaves, wood chips, grass clippings, and straw are equally flammable (if not more so), so this criticism may be unwarranted.

While some of the safety concerns are valid, there appears to be a dearth of research on this topic. Are conservationists and gardening purists hastily sounding the alarm or is rubber mulch indeed an unsafe product? Before adding this mulch to your vegetable garden, you may want to experiment with some potted plants and see how they react to the rubber mulch.

For more information regarding the criticisms of rubber mulch, read Ms. Chalker-Scott's article, *The Myth of Rubberized Landscapes*, available at: http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~Linda%20Chalker-Scott/Horticultural%20Myths_files/Myths/Rubber%20mulch.pdf and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's article, available at: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/pdf/rubber.pdf>.

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Living Fossils – The Dawn Redwood by Dan Sorensen

Any plant that has existed on the planet for over 100 million years deserves some respect. The Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, stands alongside the ginkgo in this class, but it deserves admiration for its beauty as well as for its doggedness. Known from many fossilized specimens from around the northern hemisphere for two hundred years, it was generally considered to be extinct. But in 1941 a Chinese forester noticed an unusual old tree with a shrine at its base in a small village in a remote Chinese valley in Szechuan province. He collected and sent samples to be identified to universities in Beijing and Nanking. It was positively identified as the same as the fossil species, but because of civil unrest and the communist revolution in China during this period, further study and collection was nearly impossible for several years. In 1948, Dr. Ralph Chaney, a paleobotanist from the University of California braved the difficult and dangerous journey to China, traveling upriver by boat and along hazardous rocky footpaths, protected from the bandits in the interior by armed guards, to examine the tree. He and his companion also discovered a number of small groves in deep mountain ravines where the dawn redwoods were growing among such trees familiar to North Americans as beech, oak, chestnuts and birches. Doctor Chaney described the significance of this find when he said, "Finding a living dawn redwood is at least as remarkable as discovering a living dinosaur."



Dawn Redwood fall foliage

Though not so tall or massive as its relatives, the Coast Redwoods and Giant Sequoias of California, it will grow up to 100 feet high and is believed it may eventually prove to be able to grow to as much as 150 feet. It has soft green needles which are arranged at right angles to each other in a flat plane along the twigs. The trunk gradually develops a pyramidal shape that is unusual among trees that will grow in Pennsylvania and the bark becomes red and stringy. Unlike its more famous evergreen relatives that require milder climates, the dawn redwood is deciduous and its needles turn a beautiful bronze-red or ginger color in the fall before they drop off for the winter. A young dawn redwood appears much like a Bald Cypress, though it tends to be more vigorous and hardier in our northern Pennsylvania climate. It easily will winter through USDA zone 5 with no damage and some sources suggest it will take as low as -40° F (USDA zone 3). I have been growing two specimens in Russell for thirty years now



and have experienced no damage from cold. In addition it has few if any significant insect pests, a fact that my experience also supports, and I have yet to see any damage from rabbits or deer. Once past it's awkward teenage years the young tree adopts the pleasing conical shape and the trunk begins to develop its characteristic shape and bark as well.

Many nurseries now offer it for sale. Because this tree has only recently been introduced into cultivation from the wild, most plants available for purchase are wild seedlings or cuttings. If you look hard you may find one new variety called Golden Dawn-redwood which has golden needles rather than the normal green ones. If you know of a tree and are patient, it is quite easy to start new trees with either hardwood or softwood cuttings following standard techniques. If you are very patient you may want to try starting them from seeds. Chiltern Seeds, an English nursery that will ship seeds to the United States (<http://www.chilternseeds.co.uk>), has them listed in their new catalog and they claim they are very easy to germinate and grow.

The Dawn Redwood is classified by the World Conservation Union as “critically endangered”, but worldwide propagation of this beautiful tree is ensuring that although it may die out in the wild, it will live on in gardens and landscapes around the world as long as gardeners exist.

A Quick Guide to Rooting Hardwood Cuttings

Don't be intimidated by the idea of propagating your own woody plants with hardwood cuttings. Although some plants are admittedly very difficult to multiply with cuttings, many are very easy. No special equipment is required. Begin by filling a pot or other container with drain holes with perlite, vermiculite or coarse sand. Sphagnum peat may also be used by itself or in combination with the aforementioned materials. The main thing is to be certain the medium is well drained yet well moistened. In late winter or early spring, when the plants are still dormant, cut straight, strong stems with several healthy buds about eight or nine inches long, preferably from the previous season's growth. Insert the cuttings with the bottom side down so that about 1 or two inches is exposed above the rooting medium. Dipping the lower portions of the cuttings in commercial rooting hormone will increase the success rate in most cases. Moisten the medium again, making sure that the cuttings are firmly in place, and place the container in a plastic bag in a cool place (40 – 50 degrees) out of direct sunlight. Monitor the bag to be sure it doesn't dry out and wait for signs of growth. Don't try to hurry the process too much by subjecting it to higher temperatures. It is important for roots to begin forming before the tops start to grow, or the roots may not be able to support the top growth that will emerge. As the weather warms and top growth emerges, check for root development by tugging slightly on the cuttings. As roots develop, carefully lift them and plant them in pots with soil. Remove any flower buds that try to grow. Gradually acclimate them to sunlight and when danger of frost is past, you may plant them outdoors in their permanent location or in a nursery row for additional growth. - DS

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven -
A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

- Ecclesiastes, 3:1-2